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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000178

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [MO](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN POLITICIAN CALLS ON U.S. TO RESTORE  
PRESIDENT

REF: A. RABAT 0172 (NOTAL)  
[1](#)B. RABAT 0165 (NOTAL)  
[1](#)C. NOUAKCHOTT 0159

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Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On February 24, 2009, Mauritanian National Party for Development (PND) President and current opposition coalition leader Abdelkoudouss Abeidna, at his and Embassy Nouakchott,s request, called on Charge at the Embassy to discuss the ongoing political crisis in Mauritania. As leader of a political party opposed to the August 2008 coup d'etat in Mauritania, Abeidna thanked that United States for its strong opposition to the coup. He urged U.S. pressure on Morocco, other African countries, and to adopt a similar posture. The Mauritanian party leader asserted that without restoration of ousted Mauritanian President Abdellahi to power, democracy in Mauritania might never take full root. He added, if Mauritania proceeds with June 6 elections organized by the junta, they will be illegitimate and will be precooked by the ruling military authorities. He accused junta leader General Aziz of massive corruption and called him the worst leader that Mauritania had seen in a long time. Abeidna delivered the same message to the embassies of UN Security Council and EU members during the remainder of his week in Rabat. End summary.

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Pressure Morocco to Oppose Mauritanian Junta  
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[1](#)2. (C) On February 24, 2009, the President of the Mauritanian National Party for Development (PND) Abdelkoudouss Abeidna, at his and Embassy Nouakchott,s request, called on Charge at the Embassy to discuss the ongoing political crisis in Mauritania. Abeidna offered deep thanks for the United States, condemnation of the coup in Mauritania and support for restoration of President Abdellahi to power. In his interactions with various political leaders and diplomats in recent months, Abeidna said that the "Anglo-Saxon countries," Algeria, and Mali were unambiguous in criticism of the coup and the junta, and in calling for the restoration of democracy. He added that most African Francophone countries and European countries, by contrast, were unhelpful in accommodating the junta. Abeidna added

that Morocco,s posture of placing stability above democracy as a policy priority in Mauritania had been especially disappointing. Abeidna appealed to Charge for the United States to apply greater pressure on Morocco to more strongly condemn the coup and to support restoration of President Abdellahi to power, adding: &The United States can have a big impact on Morocco,s position.8 Adeidna said that Morocco was deluding itself if it thought that Aziz could &deliver the Sahara.8 He asserted that the Mauritanian population is divided on the question of whether or not the Western Sahara should be integrated into Morocco or become independent. He added that most Mauritians benefit from the status quo, owing to the economic activity gained from smuggling in the region, and adding, "Whether or not Aziz is in power, this dynamic will not change."

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Appeal to Restore President to Power  
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13. (C) Abeidna said that he knew that restoring Abdellahi to power was the &tougher road.8 He said, however, it was the only thing that President Abdellahi would accept. Abeidna added that President Abdellahi has stated that if, upon returning to power, he is unable to &bring the parties together,8 then he would call for early elections. Abeidna asserted that he knows President Abdellahi well. While he allowed that President Abdellahi had made mistakes in office, Abeidna asserted that they were mostly made in naivete or because of lack of experience. Abeidna added that there were still many nefarious holdovers from former President Taya's regime still in positions of power, contributing to government mismanagement. However, Adeidna asserted, "Everyone knows the politicians that like money in

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Mauritania, and Abdellahi was not one of them."

14. (C) Second, but more importantly, Abeidna said that restoration of Abdellahi is a critical condition to meet if democracy is to take root again in Mauritania. &Defending the principle of democracy is more important than any individual.8 Abeidna likened the coup to a physical wound: &We cannot simply put cream on it and hope for the best; the wound must be cleaned (by returning President Abdellahi to power), bound and allowed to heal.8 As a side bar, Abeidna considered recent Libyan mediation in the impasse to be a &waste of time,8 because &Libyans do not know the meaning of democracy.8 When Libyan negotiators asked why Abeidna was clinging to democratic options, derisively adding that &democracy is just a word,8 Abeidna retorted, &But I like that word.8 Abeidna said that if Mauritania had elections under military rule, one might as well not have the elections at all. &You cannot expect people to vote freely when a gun is pointed at their head," said Abeidna. He added that even if the scheduled June 6 elections provide a fig leaf for the Europeans to restore assistance to Mauritania, long-term stability in Mauritania would not be served if the coup is allowed to stand.

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Popular Support for the Junta Exaggerated  
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15. (C) Abeidna told Charge that he was &making the rounds8 of embassies in Rabat (especially Security Council and EU members) not only to pressure Morocco, but to tell the diplomatic community what is &really going on in Mauritania.8 He said the junta had conducted a good disinformation campaign regarding the degree of popular support it had, issuing lies to build domestic and international legitimacy. Abeidna asserted that junta leader General Abdul Aziz was the worst leader that Mauritania had had in a long time and was more corrupt than President Abdellahi,s wife had ever been. He said that the 96 million Euros the junta received from the European Union for fishing

rights in late September had completely disappeared by November. He also claimed that the USD 50 million that Saudi Arabia recently gave to the junta had disappeared. Abeidna added that while the junta asserts it lowered the price of fuel, it is simply taking credit for softening world market conditions. "In reality," he added, "gas is more difficult to get because Aziz has restricted importation licenses to crony family members and allies in exchange for kickbacks."

¶6. (C) Abeidna also accused Aziz of having connections with powerful drug rings and that the reason for the coup was mainly tied to financial and tribal interests, adding that only when President Abdellahi decided to move against the drug lords did Aziz launch his coup. However, after the international backlash from the coup, Aziz,s tribe decided that the &world had rejected Aziz8 and that returning Colonel Vall to power would be the best course of action. Abeidna described Aziz as self-absorbed, suffering from a &god complex,8 i.e., "He thinks that he is the only one who can save Mauritania;" and he is out of touch with reality. His policies are populist in nature, and he is making no preparations for the coming economic problems that will hit Mauritania when the world financial crisis begins to bite. Additionally, Abeidna claimed that the General is a chameleon that cannot be counted on for principled policies. As an example, Abeidna insisted that Aziz was prepared to trade away Mauritanian recognition of Israel at the recent Palestinian Gaza donor conference in Qatar until he discovered that the money he thought he could get for it from Qatar, and other unnamed countries, was too low.

¶7. (C) Charge assured Abeidna that the U.S. Government had already engaged the Government of Morocco (GOM) at the highest levels and that the U.S. would continue to press the GOM to voice opposition to the coup and the scheduled June 6 elections. Charge thanked Abeidna for delivering his message and invited him to engage in continued dialogue with the Embassy in Nouakchott.

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¶8. (C) Comment: It is apparent from Abeidna,s appeal and the recent junta Foreign Minister,s visit to Morocco (Ref B) that Morocco is seen by both sides in Mauritania as a critical player. However, given Morocco's early support for the junta, likely foreknowledge of the coup, and the Moroccan Foreign Minister,s recent comments, we doubt that additional U.S. pressure, beyond what has already been applied, will make a difference in Morocco's posture. End comment.

¶9. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Jackson